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SUBJECT: REINVIGORATING PUBLIC DIPLOMACY CULTURAL AND SPORTS PROGRAMS

REF: State 222516

1. (U) Post welcomes renewed attention by ECA to cultural and sports diplomacy as important tools to support mission objectives(reftel). Following responses are keyed to reftel paragraph four.

A: Which of your mission objectives benefits from cultural programs or could be better supported by cultural and sports programs?

2. Just about all our mission objectives can be supported through selected use of cultural and sports programming because they enable us to reach new audiences and strengthen already established contacts, publicize mission activities with regard to promoting peace and tsunami recovery, and present a more balanced, sophisticated view of U.S. society and policies. For example, our Spring 2004 tour of Sri Lanka and the Maldives by a Mississippi Blues quartet allowed us to highlight our assistance to tsunami displaced people by bringing the performances directly to the IDP camps and generating media coverage of the events. Similarly, the recent performances in Sri Lanka of the New Orleans Mardi Gras collective received widespread publicity and were televised on national TV, thereby allowing us to emphasize to a large audience the assistance we had provided to the country after the tsunami, as well as our gratitude for Sri Lanka's aid following Hurricane Katrina.

3. Our recent Alumni grant to support a program to promote fair trials throughout the country supports our mission objective of encouraging human rights, and our ACCESS grant for underprivileged students to study English brought together Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim youth as a way of supporting the mission's goal of fostering peace. A photography exhibit on American architecture opened up new audiences of architects, artists and designers in both Sri Lanka and the Maldives, just as programming a "clean" American hip-hop DJ helped us reach the younger elites and promoted a more balanced view of American music than the prevalent Gangsta rap stereotype.

4. Sports programming could also be extremely helpful if more were on offer. The basketball cultural envoys we programmed in 2004 connected with youth from all ethnic groups who normally have no interaction with Americans. Sports programming might also allow us to reach parts of the country we normally visit rarely. For example, cricket completely dominates the sports scene in most of Sri Lanka, but in the East, where many Muslims live, soccer is equally popular. Bringing a good American university soccer team to play matches in the East would help us connect more with the Muslim community.

B: What kind of specific cultural or sports programs or initiatives are, or would be, most effective in supporting those objectives?

5. We have found that perhaps our least effective visual arts programs are paper shows since we have noticed a tendency of passersby to ignore them while proceeding to their destination. Most paper shows are not large enough or visually striking enough to be programmed as solo exhibits, but must be placed in conjunction with conferences, seminars and other exhibits.

6. The most effective sports programming we could suggest would be to send the U.S. cricket team to Sri Lanka for at least a week to play a series of one day matches against local club teams (playing the national team would be too much of a mismatch). Not only would this generate huge publicity, but it would showcase the multiethnic nature of American society. We would like to propose a tour of Sri Lanka in May by USA Cricket in support of our AID mission, which is planning 50th anniversary celebrations this year. Proceeds from the matches would be allocated to tsunami or war-affected schoolchildren in different parts of the

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country. Such a tour would have the added advantage of being naturally attractive to private sector cost-sharing here, as Sri Lankan companies regularly sponsor cricket matches and events.

17. As previously stated, sending good university level soccer teams here and to the Maldives for a tour would also be beneficial in reaching new audiences. Finally, there is a great need in Sri Lanka and Maldives for high quality coaches in swimming, track and field and basketball. For coaches to be effective, however, they would need to be attached to a single institution for at least three months.

18. Theater holds the potential to be highly effective in reaching mixed audiences and in relaying messages that support our mission objectives. For example, a country-wide tour of a play such as West Side Story, or any play dealing with ethnic strife or harmony, would resonate in support of peace building. To be truly effective on a wide basis, however, the play would have to be translated into Sinhala and Tamil and put on by local actors in local languages. This has been done before with great success in other countries, under the direction of an American director provided with a good translator for the duration. An American director should expect to spend at least 6 weeks working with local troupes to put on an American play.

19. Film festivals offer vast possibilities for supporting mission objectives since one can identify good films on almost any topic that would align well with mission priorities. However, for films to have broad impact, we must acquire rights to showing 16 mm films in regular cinemas to audiences of several hundred. Current MPA restrictions limit us to American Center venues and small audiences.

110. Musical groups may also be very effective in cementing positive relations with elite audiences. For example, high quality jazz and blues and classical groups can enthrall local elites with American artistry and creativity. We have found, however, that programming successfully for much larger, broader Sri Lankan audiences often requires "name" acts. Unfortunately, sponsors here will only sign up for the performances if they perceive that an elite, well-heeled audience will attend, not the masses.

111. Institutional linkages can provide solid grounding for long-term relationships with American artists and athletes. We believe the best possibilities for such linkages lie in the sports arena, especially in soccer and track and field and swimming.

1C. What constraints does your mission face in effectively utilizing cultural, arts, and sports programs?

112. Our mission faces several constraints in programming arts and sports. First, the ongoing violence in the North and East of the country greatly limits our ability to program in those areas, thereby cutting off a significant part of the Tamil population. Second, outside of Colombo, English comprehension and fluency is relatively low, so that any programming in the provinces must be visual or aural in nature, not verbal. Third, most of the sports in which Americans excel are not widely popular in Sri Lanka. The sports mentioned above -- soccer, track and field and swimming -- offer the best opportunities for programming, although cricket overwhelms all other sports in popularity. Fourth, enticing co-sponsors from the private sector can be problematic since they are only interested in the narrow sector of society that has ample disposable income. The middle class is this small country is quite limited in its purchasing power. Fifth, the PD staff is small compared to other countries, just three American officers (PAO, IO and CAO) and two FSN cultural specialists to cover two countries. We are slated to lose the CAO slot next year since it is a DRI position.

1D. Have you been able to partner with the private sector in your country to sponsor cultural / sports events or to overcome resource constraints?

113. We successfully partnered with the private sector on our Mississippi blues program and on our Mardi Gras New Orleans collective program. We offered logos on all tickets, posters and banners to media companies in exchange for promotion of the events on the air and in newspapers. This saved considerable funds normally used for advertising and promotion. Art galleries have offered us the use of their space at very reduced rates in return for a certain number of invitations to the exhibit openings. We have also partnered with the local AmCham to co-sponsor events such as a performance by a Navy band. And we regularly partner with local institutions to sponsor lectures and seminars by visiting speakers or specialists such as the Arts in Embassies artist we have currently visiting.

114. We believe there is some room to increase the scale of our

cultural programming in Sri Lanka and the Maldives, provided we can attract co-sponsorship and maintain sufficient resources. Particularly in sports programming, we think we could have a larger influence beyond the traditional elites in the largest cities.

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